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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [QA](#)

SUBJECT: MINSTATE AL-MAHMOUD COMMENTS ON HOW TO ADVANCE  
MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Classified By: Ambassador Joseph E. LeBaron, for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

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(C) KEY POINTS  
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-- Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Ahmed Al-Mahmoud told Ambassador November 24 that Qatar and the United States, as strategic partners, seek the same strategic goals in a Middle East peace. However, the two sides differ in some of their approaches towards those shared goals.

-- Al-Mahmoud said Qatar supports Hamas in part because it won the Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006, elections in which Qatar had "pushed Hamas" to participate -- at the specific request of the United States and other governments.

-- Al-Mahmoud said Qatar also supports Mahmoud Abbas and does not want him to resign.

-- Ambassador briefly explored with Al-Mahmoud how Qatar and the USG might form the same kind of constructive relationship and reinforcing approach on the peace process that they have on Darfur, an approach strongly welcomed by Al-Mahmoud, the GOQ point man on Darfur.

-- On a possible POTUS-Amir meeting, Ambassador and Al-Mahmoud agreed that such a meeting needed to be thoroughly discussed and prepped by both sides, so that there were no missteps, misunderstandings, or miscues during such a crucial meeting.

End Key Points.

[11](#). (C) In a November 24 meeting with Ambassador, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Ahmed Al-Mahmoud presented Qatar's thinking on advancing peace between Israel and the Palestinians. He noted that Hamas won the Palestinian elections. As such, "in this region we do not see them as a terrorist organization." Even though Qatar and U.S. policies on Hamas differ, Al-Mahmoud stressed that Qatar and the U.S. are of one mind in support of peace. Qatar and the U.S., for example, share the goal that Mahmoud Abbas stay on as head of the Palestinian Authority.

[12](#). (C) Al-Mahmoud offered that Abbas resigned because the international community is talking, but taking no action. Israeli settlement activity has not fully stopped, and the results on the ground are not changing. "The U.S. asks the Arabs to do 1, 2, 3 -- but no one makes demands of Israel." Al-Mahmoud reiterated that Qatar and the U.S. share the same objectives, but not necessarily the same procedures in reaching them. Noting that Hamas participated in the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections and won, he said it was impossible for Qatar to isolate them as terrorists after "we pushed them to participate."

[13](#). (C) Ambassador asked if Al-Mahmoud thought it would be

possible for the United States and Qatar to develop common, or at least mutually reinforcing, steps toward the strategic goal they share: a resolution of the Arab-Israeli issue. "Yes," replied Al-Mahmoud, "if we work together." He reminded Ambassador that in the past Qatar encouraged the U.S. to support Shaykh Sharif in Somalia. The U.S. and Qatar at the time did not see eye to eye. Now, though, the U.S. has come around and supports Shaykh Sharif, noted Al-Mahmoud.

¶4. (C) Ambassador observed that he arrived in Qatar during a period of tension in the bilateral political relationship, but "we found a way to work together constructively on Darfur." Ambassador underscored all the good that Al-Mahmoud personally had achieved by working with Special Envoys for Sudan Williamson and (now) Gration. Bearing this in mind, Ambassador asked how Qatar and the U.S. work might work together now on the Palestinian problem.

¶5. (C) Al-Mahmoud responded, in effect, that the best way was stepped up engagement within the political relationship. Qatar's Prime Minister, Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani, had met with Secretary Clinton on the margins of the Forum for the Future in Morocco. More meetings, more consultations, were the key.

¶6. (C) Al-Mahmoud attributed the problems in the relationship to a lack of communication. The Bush Administration "isolated us" and did not want to discuss aims or procedures. The previous Administration, he continued, chose to listen to others in the region about Qatar's motives and policies and not discuss concerns with us directly. "As I've told you, we want a strategic relationship for now and the

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future."

¶7. (C) Ambassador asked if there were differences of opinion among Qatar's senior leaders on the strategic relationship with the U.S. Al-Mahmoud said in response, "We definitely all want better relations."

¶8. (C) Turning to an eventual meeting between President Obama and the Amir, Ambassador said any such meeting would need to be worked out in advance. Al-Mahmoud agreed, observing that Qatar had some very bad experiences after opening up its strategic relationship with the U.S. and did not want a bad meeting.

¶9. (C) Al-Mahmoud, noting that Qatar postponed a GCC Foreign Ministers' meeting to help make the Forum for the Future a success, said Qatar wants to help the U.S. with the burden of advancing peace between Israel and the Palestinians. We know that President Obama and the U.S. are sincere in wanting peace. However, Al-Mahmoud said "negotiations without preconditions sound good," but the reality is that continued Israeli settlement activity does not set the stage for productive talks. The King of Jordan is under pressure; all of us are under pressure, said Al-Mahmoud.

LeBaron